Raising Illinois

RAISING ILLINOIS, FY2026 PROGRESS REPORT

This document outlines Raising Illinois' accomplishments for FY 2026, from July 1, 2025 - June 30, 2026, across the coalition's six issue areas and three interconnected goals within the Illinois Prenatal to-Three Policy Agenda.

October, 2026

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INTRODUCTION

Raising Illinois, powered by Start Early, is a collective effort to create an equitable and cohesive system of supports for expecting families, infants, toddlers and the communities in which they live. This document outlines the annual progress made in **Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 (July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026)** toward the objectives set by the Raising Illinois Prenatal-to-Three (PN3) Policy Agenda for the five-year period from FY 2025 to FY 2029. These objectives span **six issue areas across three interconnected goals**:

- *Healthy Parents and Babies*
  - Perinatal Supports
  - Home Visiting
- *High-Quality Early Development and Learning*
  - Early Care and Learning
  - Early Intervention
- *Stable Workforce and Thriving Families*
  - Cross-System Workforce
  - Economic Security

This document reports annual progress for each issue area under **four policy advancement strategies**:

- Budget advocacy
- Legislative advocacy
- Administrative and implementation advocacy
- Public awareness, engagement and mobilization

Recognizing the collaborative nature of this work, each accomplishment also notes the specific level of involvement by Raising Illinois:

- **Leader** = Coalition directed a relevant project, initiative, or activity using allocated staff and resources
- **Partner** = Coalition contributed to a relevant project, initiative, or activity led by another entity
- **Supporter** = Coalition amplified or otherwise aligned with another entity's effort

Despite ongoing federal challenges for the early childhood field, Raising Illinois' dedicated champions and partners can take pride in our state's collective achievements in FY 2026 that continue to make a meaningful impact during the most formative years of a child's life—the first three. Visit www.raisingillinois.org/get-involved to join Raising Illinois and be a part of our robust and diverse advocacy efforts.

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PERINATAL SUPPORTS

Budget

- Appropriation of **$118 million** in FY 2027 (level with FY 2026) for the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) to support **safety-net hospitals** in serving more uninsured and underinsured residents, including those seeking maternal care **(Supporter)**
- Appropriation of **$50 million** in FY 2027 (25% over FY 2026) for the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services (HFS) to increase payment system rates for **Federally Qualified Health Centers** that treat uninsured and underinsured residents in outpatient settings, including those seeking maternal care **(Supporter)**
- Appropriation of **$4 million** in FY 2027 (level with FY 2026) for IDPH to extend community-based grants through the **Birth Equity Initiative** **(Supporter)**

Legislation

- Passage of House Bill (HB) 4606, authorizing the Illinois Department of Human Services to design, implement and maintain the **infrastructure to support the expansion of short-term universal newborn home visiting services**, also known as Universal Newborn Support Systems (UNSS) **(Partner)**
- Passage of Senate Bill (SB) 3365, extending the **health equity add-on payment for safety-net hospitals**, among other provisions **(Supporter)**

Administration & Implementation

- Continued implementation and expansion of **Family Connects**, a UNSS model:
    - In the **City of Chicago**, offered in-home visits to nearly **9,800 families** across 11 hospitals **(Partner)**
    - In **Peoria County and Stephenson County**, offered in-home visits to nearly **2,200 families** combined **(Partner)**
    - In **Winnebago County**, launched the **Winning Start Winnebago initiative**, which includes in-home visits **(Partner)**
- Implementation of **Medicaid coverage for maternity care services provided by a licensed certified professional midwife**, as directed under Pub. Act 103-720 **(Supporter)**
- Launch of a **lactation support integration pilot**, led by IDPH, the Illinois Public Health Institute, and the Illinois Perinatal Quality Collaborative, to support hospitals in improving how expecting and new families are connected to lactation support services **(Supporter)**
- Selection of **5 health care providers** to pilot a new Medicaid payment mechanism that incentivizes integrated maternity care under the **Transforming Maternal Health Model** announced in FY 2025 **(Supporter)**

- Federal award of **$193.4 million** annually for five years to HFS for the **Rural Health Transformation Program** to expand equitable access to health care and reduce barriers that rural communities face **(Supporter)**
- Disbursement of **$50 million** from HFS under the **Safety Net Obstetrical Supplemental Payment Program** for safety-net hospitals that maintain perinatal designation from IDPH to preserve or enhance maternal health services **(Supporter)**
- Disbursement of **$13.5 million** from HFS under the **Critical Access Hospital OB and Other Treatment Services Supplemental Payment Program** to strengthen maternal health and other services provided by critical access hospitals **(Supporter)**
- Disbursement of **$3.5 million** from IDPH for the **Birth Equity Innovation Seed Grants** to **12 community-based programs** **(Supporter)**
- Federal award of **$3 million** to the Illinois Primary Health Care Association for the **Connecting Kids to Coverage Outreach and Enrollment Cooperative Agreement** **(Supporter)**

Public Awareness, Engagement & Mobilization

- Production and facilitation of ***Raising Our Voices: This Year's Progress & The Road Ahead***, a statewide virtual convening of parents, providers, state agency leaders and legislators reaching over **150 participants**, to highlight cross-cutting advocacy accomplishments and priorities, including perinatal supports **(Leader)**
- Publication of the **Illinois Birth Equity Blueprint**, a strategic plan from the Governor and IDPH to improve maternal health and birth outcomes through enhanced interagency and public-private coordination **(Partner)**
- Engagement of parents statewide through the **Maternal and Child Health Family Councils** in support of IDPH's **Title V Maternal and Child Health Block Grant Action Plan** **(Supporter)**
- Creation of the **HFS Federal Resource Center** to share information and guidance for stakeholders on the impact of federal changes to Medicaid **(Supporter)**

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HOME VISITING

Budget

- Appropriation of **$748.1 million** in FY 2027 (level with FY 2026) for the Illinois Department of Early Childhood (IDEC) to administer the **Early Childhood Block Grant**, including Prevention Initiative-Home Visiting **(Partner)**
- Appropriation of **$27.9 million** in FY 2027 (level with FY 2026) for IDEC to administer the **Maternal and Child Home Visiting Program (Partner)**

Administration & Implementation

- Award of **new HealthChoice Illinois contracts** between the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services and 6 managed care organizations, which were evaluated, in part, on their ability to **connect pregnant and postpartum beneficiaries to community-based home visiting and doula services (Partner)**

Public Awareness, Engagement & Mobilization

- Production and facilitation of ***Raising Our Voices: This Year's Progress & The Road Ahead***, a statewide virtual convening of parents, providers, state agency leaders and legislators reaching over **150 participants**, to highlight cross-cutting advocacy accomplishments and priorities, including home visiting **(Leader)**
- Continuation of the Home Visiting Impact Awards, a **home visitor appreciation campaign** to raise awareness and boost staff morale **(Leader)**
- Engagement of over **260 prenatal-to-three professionals**, including home visitors, for a summer listening session about the **Illinois Department of Early Childhood governance transition (Leader)**
- Development of the revised **Home Visiting Staffing and Salary Survey**, conducted by the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies **(Partner)**

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EARLY CARE & LEARNING

Budget

- Appropriation of **$832.1 million** in FY 2027 (7.1% over FY 2026) for the Illinois Department of Early Childhood (IDEC) to raise reimbursement rates for Family Child Care providers and accommodate caseload growth in the **Child Care Assistance Program** (CCAP) **(Partner)**
- Appropriation of **$748.1 million** in FY 2027 (level with FY 2026) for IDEC to administer the **Early Childhood Block Grant**, including Prevention Initiative-Center Based **(Partner)**
- Appropriation of **$200 million** in FY 2027 (level with FY 2026) for IDEC to award **Smart Start Workforce Grants** **(Partner)**

Legislation

- Passage of House Bill (HB) 3595, **changing terminology** from "day care" to "early care and education," **modernizing child care licensing exemptions** and **tying employee background checks to the individual** rather than the provider **(Supporter)**
- Passage of HB 4587, **creating qualifications for interim conditional child care directors** who can work for a 12-month period under supervision by a fully credentialed child care director **(Supporter)**
- Passage of HB 5099, **transferring administration of child care background checks** from the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services to IDEC **(Supporter)**

Administration & Implementation

- Submission of a public comment **opposing the removal of federal requirements for Head Start compensation and benefits** **(Leader)**
- Expansion of the **online application for CCAP** to cover all Service Delivery Areas statewide **(Supporter)**
- Disbursement of **$193.5 million** for **Smart Start Workforce Grants** awarded to nearly **4,300 providers** **(Supporter)**

Public Awareness, Engagement & Mobilization

- Production and facilitation of ***Raising Our Voices: This Year's Progress & The Road Ahead***, a statewide virtual convening of parents, providers, state agency leaders and legislators reaching over **150 participants**, to highlight cross-cutting advocacy accomplishments and priorities, including early care and learning **(Leader)**
- Engagement of over **180 infant-toddler providers** for a **fall listening session series on the IDEC governance transition**, in collaboration with Illinois Action for Children **(Partner)**
- Facilitation of a **spring panel discussion on proposed changes to early care and learning funding design under IDEC**, reaching over **200 participants**, in collaboration with Illinois Action for Children **(Partner)**
- Engagement of over **260 prenatal-to-three professionals**, including infant-toddler educators, for a **summer listening session about the IDEC governance transition** **(Leader)**

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EARLY INTERVENTION

Budget

- Appropriation of **$176.9 million** in FY 2027 (9.3% over FY 2026) to the Illinois Department of Early Childhood (IDEC) for **Early Intervention** (EI) to increase reimbursement rates for some provider types, maintain current service levels and make operational improvements **(Partner)**

Legislation

- Passage of House Bill (HB) 1783, the **Language Equality Acquisition for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or DeafBlind Children Act**, establishing a language needs and monitoring program to support the development and modification of individualized family service plans in EI, among other provisions **(Supporter)**
- Passage of HB 5225, authorizing trained speech-language pathologists to **diagnose autism spectrum disorders in children who receive EI services** and who have no known co-occurring medical conditions **(Partner)**

Administration & Implementation

- Implementation of **universal blood lead testing for all Illinois children at 12 and 24 months**, allowing for expanded identification of children who are automatically eligible for EI due to elevated blood lead levels **(Supporter)**

Public Awareness, Engagement & Mobilization

- Production and facilitation of ***Raising Our Voices: This Year's Progress & The Road Ahead***, a statewide virtual convening of parents, providers, state agency leaders and legislators reaching over **150 participants**, to highlight cross-cutting advocacy accomplishments and priorities, including EI **(Leader)**
- Mobilization of families, providers and the public to advocate for increased EI funding through the ***Babies Can't Wait: We Need EI*** **campaign**:
    - Earned nearly **40 media placements** across television, radio, print and digital outlets, with over **62 million total impressions** combined **(Leader)**
    - Collected nearly **800 signatures on a parent-led petition to the Governor**, in collaboration with Illinois Families for Early Intervention **(Partner)**
    - Logged over **120 emails and calls to the Governor** **(Leader)**
    - Convened nearly **50 providers for a strategy meeting**, in collaboration with the Grassroots Alliance for Early Intervention **(Partner)**
    - Facilitated an **EI-focused training for 25 participants** as part of Early Childhood Advocacy Day **(Leader)**
    - Organized **17 in-person legislator meetings** for EI advocates as part of Early Childhood Advocacy Day **(Leader)**

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ECONOMIC SECURITY

Budget

- Appropriation of **$70 million** in FY 2027 to the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) for the newly enacted **Families Receiving Emergency Support for Hunger (FRESH) program (Supporter)**
- Appropriation of **$15 million** in FY 2027 (level with FY 2026) to the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services for the **Medical Debt Relief Pilot Program (Supporter)**
- Appropriation of **$1.25 million** in FY 2027 (level with FY 2026) to IDHS for the **Diaper Distribution Pilot Program (Supporter)**

Legislation

- Passage of House Bill (HB) 4702, the **Diaper Labeling Act**, setting requirements for listing the ingredients in all diapers sold in Illinois **(Supporter)**
- Passage of HB 2949, the FY 2027 Budget Implementation Act, **establishing the FRESH program to provide one-time assistance of $400 to individuals who have had their Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits terminated** due to expanded federal work requirements, among other provisions **(Supporter)**
- Passage of Senate Bill (SB) 3365, allowing IDHS to **administer locally or privately funded guaranteed income pilot programs using current or future distribution methods** like Electronic Benefit Transfer, among other provisions **(Supporter)**

Administration & Implementation

- Ongoing formal collaboration between IDHS and the Illinois Head Start Association to increase participation in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) by **coordinating referrals to WIC for families enrolled in Head Start and Early Head Start programs (Supporter)**

Public Awareness, Engagement & Mobilization

- Production and facilitation of two statewide virtual convenings of parents, providers, state agency leaders and legislators:
    - ***Raising Our Voices: Nourishing Families, Fueling Impact***, highlighting Illinois' WIC program and efforts to strengthen interagency referrals and care coordination, reaching nearly **250 participants (Leader)**

- ***Raising Our Voices: This Year's Progress & The Road Ahead***, featuring cross-cutting advocacy accomplishments and priorities, including economic security, reaching over **150 participants** **(Leader)**

- Facilitation of a cross-training series for early childhood professionals to **promote coordinated referrals to the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)**, co-hosted with the West Side WIC Alliance, reaching over **550 participants** statewide **(Partner)**
- Creation of the **IDHS SNAP Federal Impact Center** to share information and guidance for stakeholders on the impact of federal changes to SNAP **(Supporter)**

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CROSS-SYSTEM WORKFORCE

Budget

- Appropriation of **$85.8 million** in FY 2027 (new consolidated funding) to operate the new **Illinois Department of Early Childhood** (IDEC) **(Partner)**
- Appropriation of **$5 million** in FY 2027 (level with FY 2026) for the **Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity** (ECACE) **(Partner)**
- Appropriation of **$2 million** in FY 2027 (level with FY 2026) for **mental health training for the frontline pediatric workforce** **(Supporter)**
- Appropriation of **$600,000** in FY 2027 (90.4% below FY 2026) for the **Human Services Professional Loan Repayment Program** (HSPLRP) **(Supporter)**
- Appropriation of **$270,000** in FY 2027 (170% over FY 2026) for the **Illinois Association of Infant Mental Health** **(Partner)**

Legislation

- Passage of House Bill (HB) 5204, **transferring the administration of the Early Learning Council to IDEC and expanding representation** to include parents, caregivers and Head Start, as well as **granting IDEC appointment authority for the ECACE advisory committee** **(Supporter)**

Administration & Implementation

- Growth of the **statewide registry for Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health consultation**, with **255 consultants** (23.8% increase over FY 2025) across all 102 counties **(Supporter)**
- Distribution of **ECACE awards** to support tuition costs for **731 students** pursuing early childhood education credentials or degrees **(Supporter)**
- Distribution of **HSPLRP awards** to support loan repayment assistance for **131 community-based human services professionals** **(Supporter)**

Public Awareness, Engagement & Mobilization

- Production and facilitation of ***Raising Our Voices: This Year's Progress & The Road Ahead***, a statewide virtual convening of parents, providers, state agency leaders and legislators reaching over **150 participants**, to highlight cross-cutting advocacy accomplishments and priorities, including workforce issues **(Leader)**
- Facilitation of a **cross-training series for early childhood professionals** to promote coordinated referrals to the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), co-hosted with the West Side WIC Alliance, reaching over **550 participants** statewide **(Partner)**